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Chestnut

by James B. Nicola

Then there was a period of reflection,
when both survivors thought about their ways
and rued the blasted wars their nations waged,
as well as domestic infractions, even those
of childhood, in their neighborhoods and basements.
For seven nights they thought. They thought and talked
and listened deeply to each other's views
as if for the first time on the tragic planet.
They grew to understand, or started to,
the follies they'd participated in,
which had made them monsters. Pausing on a cliff
that had been famous for its panorama,
they looked out at the rubble and the fumes
which stretched with every wind to the horizon,
murky as an artist's feathering of two
stark sections on a giant, full-round canvas.
And so they lived in peace. For seven days.

On the eighth they came upon and loosed,
each claiming to have spied it first, a perfect
chestnut. Since they were human after all
their hunger wrested their civility.
Civility? What civilization?
The murders, in the end, were mutual.
The week of hope was over. But at least
it was the end of violence for good.

It only remained for the gods to return
and summon a poet, one of the dead-and-greats,
whose work had been forgotten over the years,
to note the history. Here is the account
she penned in human blood, warm from the corpses.
Had she tears, she'd have mixed the ink with tears,
but as you know by now, the dead don't cry.
She starts off in Strophe One by telling you
how she remembers when she too once bled,
a pulsing human issue of the earth,
her childhood a golden phase when the world seemed kind,
but then goes on from there to what befell
so that should gods and nature try again
some million, billion, trillion years from now,
whatever species should emerge might find
the tome, some scholar break the runic code,
and all who read be forewarned of the pitfalls.